

## Budget cuts threaten lessons for adults

### Conejo seniors worry over increasing fees, disappearing classes

By Roxanne Estrada

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Ellie Crompton would lose her creative outlet so needed after retirement. Rita Collins would lose the physical exercise that keeps her out of the doctor's office. Becky Burson would lose her calming hobby of quilting while socializing with friends.

All three are students at the Conejo Valley Adult School and are worried about increasing fees and disappearing classes. Because of recent state budget cuts, senior citizens no longer receive free or discounted prices. There are also fewer classes offered and classes are canceled if enough students don't enroll.

Dominique Colell is the teacher for the sculpture/mixed media class and said she has already had both her watercolor class and Prisma pencil class closed.

"It's a shame because it's a really a good way for seniors to express their creativity and having fun like when they were kids," Colell said. "It brings a very youthful atmosphere and is great therapy."

The school is an extension of the Conejo Valley Unified School District. The Conejo Valley Adult School offers a variety of programs and classes for students 18 years and older. Budget cuts are affecting all schools in the area, but it's the adult enrichment classes that are really suffering, said Jerry Cowan, the program coordinator for the older adult division.

The adult enrichment classes are specifically aimed for senior citizens, although any adult can enroll. The state used to subsidize the classes, but now seniors have to pay full price.

Since the number of students determines if a class stays open, now is the time to get older adults involved, Cowan said. "A lot of people don't realize the classes that are available in the community," said Cowan. "There are over 18,000 seniors in our area and we only service about 2,000 of them."

Becky Burson used to attend a hand quilting class at an adult school in Ventura. The class was canceled because of budget cuts so she now commutes to the class in Thousand Oaks. But if more students don't enroll in the class, it too will be canceled this semester, she said.

"It's important for seniors to keep active," Burson said. "When seniors stop is when

they die. And this class encourages people to have a good time and it keeps you busy kibitzing.”

The Conejo Valley Adult School is on Old Farm Road in Thousand Oaks, but most of the adult enrichment classes are taught at the Goebel Center next to the Teen Center. The Goebel Center doesn’t charge rent fees so prices are kept as low as possible for seniors.

Rita Collins takes the yoga stretch class and said she wouldn’t be able to take yoga at a private studio because it’s too expensive.

“Seniors are on a fixed income and when it comes trickling down to us, it gets pretty hard on the budget,” Collins said. “You have to decide what you’re going to give up.”

Wearing her favorite sweatshirt, which says, “Yoga is cheaper than a therapist,” Collins said she started practicing yoga after she retired to stay healthy. Another benefit of the adult classes is that everyone is at the same level, she said.

“A majority of seniors are sedentary and don’t do anything and become depressed,” said Collins, a Moorpark resident. “But doing this builds camaraderie when you meet people and it’s very good for your mental health.”

The classes currently offered during the fall semester are hand quilting, machine quilting, oil and acrylic painting, sculpture/mixed media, stitchery needlework, yoga stretch, advanced Spanish and aerobic dance.

Crompton, a Thousand Oaks resident, said she loves trying different classes because “the creativity is endless.”

She is currently taking her third class, sculpture/mixed media, and hopes to attend a calligraphy or photography class offered in the spring.

“Having the facilities near for seniors is phenomenal and I hope they continue to have classes but that’s just me because I love to create and make things,” she said.

For information on enrolling in a class, contact the Conejo Valley Adult School for a schedule. The telephone number is 497-2761 and the website is <http://www.conejoadultschool.org>.



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